

LIVINGSTON EMPLOYER BREEZE

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JOB FAIRS ARE BECOMING THE NORM!

By Gail Habener

With Montana's booming growth, new employers are scrambling to hire full staff. Seems the entire state is experiencing the crunch of low unemployment. Each Workforce Center engages the match between Employer and Job Seeker in different and creative ways. Billings Workforce Center has several "mini" fairs, employer specific fairs and employers hold recruiting days at their office. Their Job Fair brought in 85 employers and 550 job seekers. Missoula Workforce Center held their Fair at U of M and had 114 employers attending, a big affair to be sure. Bozeman Job Service held their Job Jamboree on April 18 at the fairgrounds and had 78 employers and approximately 1100 job seekers attended.

Something new this year for the Livingston Job Service are the businesses that have called to attend our Job Fest from outside of our tri-county area! Billings, Bozeman, they are calling from all over to come look us over and recruit our best and the brightest!

Employers who are interested are encouraged to call and reserve your booth ASAP as the Civic Center is filling up! To reserve your spot please call the Livingston Job Service at 406-222-0520 or email: ghabener@mt.gov. We look forward to seeing all of our business partners.

RETIREMENT ANNOUNCEMENT

By Al Maurillo

Jerri Miller is retiring the 27th of July of this year. As her Co-Worker and Manager, I am happy that Jerri is starting her next adventure, but also saddened to be losing a wonderful resource and co-worker. I guess I can't accuse her of job hopping, 18 years is a pretty good stint with any employer.

Jerri started working for the Livingston Job Service on May 28, 1989; that's three decades ago. When Jerri started she was the Receptionist in the old office at 228 South Main. She was in that position for approximately six years until promoted to Employment Consultant. Jerri worked as an Employment Consultant for another six years and in 2001, she was promoted to Business Advocate.

Our Business Advocate program has been a huge success statewide and due to Jerri's efforts, it has been especially effective in our area. For those of you who aren't familiar with this program, it was created to assist small businesses who don't have the benefit of a Human Resources department. Jerri assists businesses with issues like: progressive discipline, employee handbooks, personnel

manuals, Equal Employment Opportunity, Family Medical Leave, and all of the programs that are difficult to understand and costly if you make a mistake.

Jerri's Business Advocate duties also include coordinating the Job Service Employer Committee. She excels in this role and was recognized in 2002 and named the "JSEC Coordinator of the Year." This recognition was long overdue and the Livingston JSEC had been recognized numerous times for its excellence.

In addition to Jerri's professional activities she has been the consummate volunteer. There is hardly a board or organization that has not benefited from her participation. Some of Jerri's activities include:

~Livingston Business and Professional Women of which Jerri has been a member of since 1989.

~Jerri was also President of the State of Montana Federation of Business and Professional Women from June 1996 to June 1997.

~Jerri became a voice for battered women and brought the Silent Witness Program to MT in 1996 when she was State President. She promoted the program with Vickie Amundson of Missoula Business & Professional Women which is now recognized nationally as a powerful way of educating people of the dire consequences of domestic violence.

~ In 2002, Jerri Miller and Vickie Amundson received the International Women's Peace Foundation award for their work with the Silent Witness program in Montana.

~ Jerri continues to encourage the local organization to focus on the issues of battered women, domestic violence, and silent witnesses as an ongoing project and as Chairman of the Board for Tri County Network Domestic and Sexual Violence.

~Jerri is Vice President of the Board of Directors for Yellowstone Country Montana. She chairs the Tourism and Education Development Committee.

~She served on the Town Council in Clyde Park for two terms 1999 to 2003

~And she served as a member of the Livingston Area Chamber Board of Directors in 1995.

When I asked Jerri if she was going to continue her history of volunteerism, she said "YES."

Jerri may be leaving our organization, but I'm sure she'll be visible in our community. Jerri, enjoy your retirement!

THERE WILL BE A COMMUNITY OPEN HOUSE FOR JERRI PRIOR TO HER LEAVING. WE'LL ADVERTISE IT IN THE ENTERPRISE.



HELP WANTED:

A Look at Labor Force Participation in Montana

By Tyler Turner and Brad Eldredge, Ph.D.

Research & Analysis Bureau, MT. Dept. Labor & Industry

Montana has experienced a tightening labor market over the last year and a half.

Both anecdotal and empirical evidence suggests that demand for workers is outstripping the supply. Whether it is a sign advertising \$12/hour starting wages at McDonalds, or the statewide unemployment rate dropping to 2.0%, it is becoming clear that workers are in short supply. A shortfall of workers has the potential to negatively affect Montana's economy. With that in mind, this article will look at the state of labor force participation in Montana and offer potential solutions to any shortage that the state may experience in the coming years.

Defining a Labor Shortage—Economists have generally agreed that “full employment” is reached when unemployment rates

near 4.5%. Anything below this rate is viewed as unsustainable in the long run and may be a hindrance to economic growth. Montana's unemployment rate has been below the 4.5% threshold since May 2003 and has been below 4.0% since

September 2005. Other evidence of a labor shortage may include rapidly rising wages. Figure One shows U.S., Montana, and Inflation (CPI) adjusted wages. Each line represents the quarterly percentage change in wages based on a base wage of \$30,000 in 2002. The data reveals that Montana wages have grown much faster than both inflation and U.S. wages.

Looking further into the wage growth issue also reveals interesting results. Anecdotal evidence has suggested that demand among businesses for labor is not being met in the low wage occupations. A simple test of this argument is to examine wage and employment growth among different occupation classes.

Occupations in Montana were broken into four broad categories: low, mid-low, mid-high, and high. These categories were defined by comparing the median wage for an occupation with the 25%, 50%, and 75% percentile wages for all occupations in Montana in 2002. For example the median wage for Waiters and Waitresses was \$13,169. This was below the 25% statewide wage of \$16,207, which places this occupation in the low category. Data was then collected through 2005 on each occupation based upon its classification in 2002. This allowed for comparisons of wage and employment growth among the categories across time.

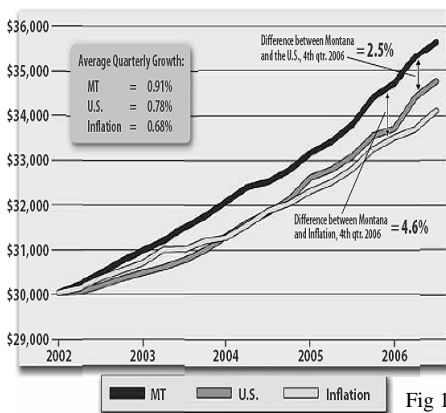


Fig 1

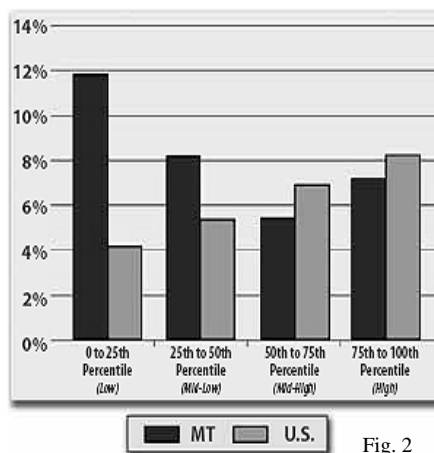


Fig. 2

Figure Two shows changes in average wages for Montana and the U.S. The two areas have an almost inverse pattern of wage growth. In Montana, occupations with low and mid-low wages have experienced the fastest wage growth, while nationally the mid-high and high

wage occupations have seen the fastest wage growth. This supports stories which suggest wage pressure is most severe among low wage occupations and offers further evidence of increased competition for workers.

Labor Force Participation—If Montana is experiencing a shortfall in available labor, then where does it turn to fill in the gaps? Perhaps the best data to answer this question are labor force participation rates. Labor force participation is simply defined as the percentage of the civilian population either employed or unemployed. By looking at labor force participation for specific subgroups of the Montana population, pools of untapped labor may be identified.

Labor Force Participation by Age and Gender—It is

well known that labor force participation will vary by age group. For example, those in their thirties are more likely to be in the labor force than those in their teens or late sixties. Figure Three shows average labor force participation rates for different age groups and genders. Male labor

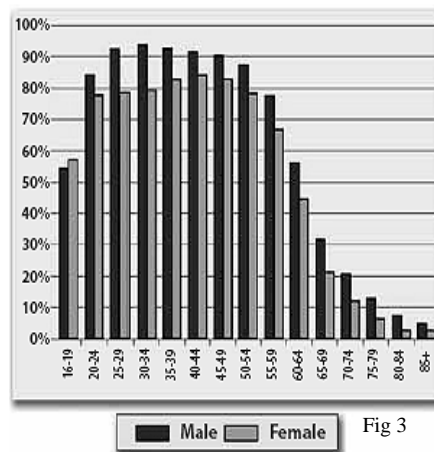


Fig 3

force participation is higher than female for every age grouping except teenagers. The gap between the two genders is widest from twenty-five to thirty-four years of age, when women are most likely to opt out of the workforce to have children. Participation for both genders begins to drop significantly at age fifty-five and drops to around 50% by age sixty.

Labor Force Participation by Educational Attainment and Gender—Educational attainment has a direct impact on a person's workforce outcome. A college graduate is more likely to participate in the labor force than a person who does not complete high school.

Data shown in Figure Four supports this argument. Labor force participation is significantly lower among individuals with lower levels of education attainment. Less than half

the population who failed to complete high school enters the labor force. All other levels of education participate at significantly higher rates.

Labor Force Participation by Race and Gender— Montana is home to two primary racial groups: whites and American Indians.

Whites comprise about 91% of the state’s population, while American Indians comprise about 6.5%. Figure Five shows labor force participation for whites and American Indians. The chart shows that for both males and females, American Indian

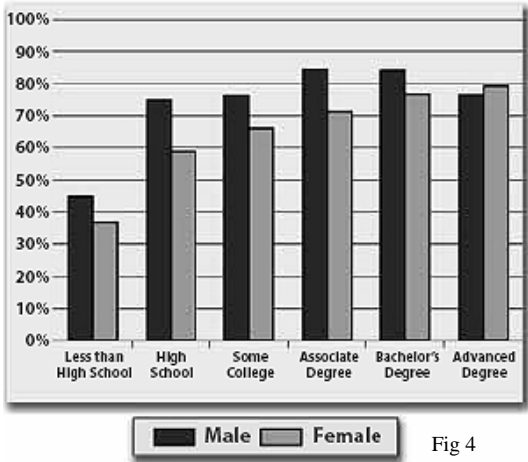


Fig 4

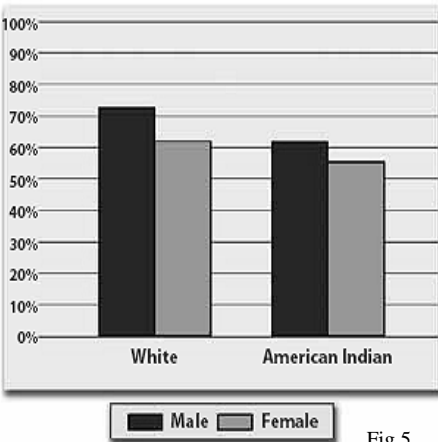


Fig 5

Conclusions—Montana needs a sufficient supply of quality workers in order to continue to grow economically. The state’s historically low unemployment rate indicates that only a small percentage of Montanans who want to work do not currently hold a job. This labor shortage threatens the quality and quantity of the goods & services produced in the state. This article has emphasized that large proportions of certain segments of the population are not currently seeking employment. For example, the data show that those without a high school level education participate at much lower rates than the rest of the population. Therefore, policies targeted at helping individuals attain a GED should have a positive effect on their labor force participation rates. The data also indicate that labor force participation rates tend to drop off at about age 55. Flexible work schedules, health insurance benefits, and fulfilling work environments have all been cited as important determinants of 55 and over participation rates. It appears the labor market is responding to the current shortage, as indicated by recent wage increases and growth in overall labor force participation rates.

It remains to be seen if new workers, whether from Montana or elsewhere, will enter the workforce in sufficient numbers to keep pace with Montana’s current economic expansion.

TOP TIPS FOR MAKING GOOD HIRING DECISIONS

By Skip Shiver

In today’s competitive job market, getting good employees depends mainly on wages and benefits, right? The truth is, finding good employees depends a good deal more on your abilities as an employer to make a good hiring decision. Even when you are desperate to fill vacancies, there are some important interviewing techniques you should be practicing in order to find the right “fit” for your job opening. Remember that as a hiring manager you aren’t successful when you turn applicants away.

Below are some tips that will help boost your chances for getting a great employee.

1. Is the applicant qualified to perform the job? Think twice before setting yourself up for failure by placing an applicant into a job that is outside his or her own knowledge, skills and abilities. While hiring someone who remotely matches your requirements may seem the wise thing to do, if you don’t consider skills & qualifications it will probably come back to haunt you, costing more money in the long run. Learn to identify and evaluate an applicant’s skills based upon the job requirements.

2. Does the applicant have employment goals? Employers should be cautious when hiring people who don’t know what they want to do. If the applicant is going through some “I don’t know what I want to be when I grow up” type of uncertainty, do yourself a favor and ask about specific employment goals rather than asking about career ambitions. Remember that without goals of some kind in place, the applicant probably has no clear direction for success.

3. Does the applicant present a professional appearance? A poor personal appearance can be the first and most tell-tale clue about the ambitions of your prospective applicant. First impressions really count, so if the applicant doesn’t present well, or is unable to dress the part, it’s a safe bet that they may not fit in with your team. Remember that smoking is not illegal, but you can stress limits and you should inform applicants if your worksite is a non-smoking environment. Keep in mind also, that you can call excessive body jewelry into question, especially when it presents a safety or health hazard in the job.

4. Is the applicant enthusiastic? An applicant doesn’t have to act like they’ve just won the lottery jackpot, but it’s important that they express some enthusiasm for the job they are applying for. If not, it might signal poor work performance, poor work ethic, or other issues that you cannot afford. If you don’t recognize any enthusiasm, make it a quick interview, thank them for applying, and start looking elsewhere.

5. Has the applicant established and communicated the value they will bring to the job? If your applicant gives the impression that they are only interested in “what’s in it for me”, you may want to think twice about hiring. Ask questions about what it is the applicant has to offer for your business and look for specific qualities in their answers. If the applicant cannot bring value to the company, they are probably not qualified to do the job.

6. How does the applicant talk about past employers?

Sometimes applicants will want to tell you something bad, negative or other horror story about a current or past employer. Use caution here, and simply interrupt by re-stating or re-phrasing your question. If the applicant insists on bad-mouthing a former employer, listen politely and then gracefully end the interview. Look for applicants that put a positive spin on their work experience instead and are seeking changes such as a more physically active job, or greater contact with people, etc.

7. Is the applicant prepared for the interview? Preparing includes practicing your answers to possible interview questions as well as researching the company. Ask questions such as, "What do you know about this company"? If the applicant stumbles with answers, it will be obvious that they are unprepared. Also, be wary if an applicant starts talking about their personal life in the interview. Avoid it at all costs. Keep the conversation on the job duties and the applicant's ability to perform the essential functions.

8. What about the applicant's people skills? The applicant's resumé looks professional. Over the phone they were polished. But in person, you weren't impressed. Remember that an applicant's personality will have to get along with every other personality on the team. If they show any sign that they can't, look for someone else. If the applicant states that they don't like working with people, or that they are weak in people skills, be on the alert. If they offer an explanation that they are a bit shy at first or prefer to work with equipment instead, ask additional questions to try and verify the claim.

9. Did the applicant communicate their strengths? An applicant should know what his or her strengths are before they interview. As a hiring manager, you should try hard to expose an applicant's weaknesses by asking some very tough interview questions. Prepare and practice how you can directly ask an applicant to reveal their weaknesses, and take note of how they respond. If an applicant has no idea of their strengths, they will likely have no idea of what value they can bring to the job.

10. Did the applicant really sell him or herself? Most people find it a bit difficult to talk about themselves in a "self-important" way, especially when they are put on the spot. Applicants should, however, be convincing as to why you should choose them over someone else. It's also important for you as the hiring manager to understand what characteristics you would like to see in your employees. For example, what factors make you choose to purchase a specific product? The reasons for your choice are the same as ones you would use to choose a good employee.

There are many tips, tricks and methods that will aide you in making a good hiring decision. However, these ten tips are among the most important. Remember that hiring is a choice and it is your responsibility to ensure you are avoiding anything that would present problems for you and your company down the road. For greater success, try learning to formulate better interview questions, being better prepared and ensure a thorough understanding of the job description. You'll be amazed with the results.